

MarketWatch: Everybody into the car pool

NEW YORK (MarketWatch) -- In auto-loving America, car pools have never really taken off as a tremendous energy-sparing idea. But this time may be different.

The more that gasoline prices rise, the more you may like the notion of carrying two, three, four or even five commuters in one vehicle. Not only will car pooling save you money but also it may well save you time in traffic. In many areas, only cars with multiple passengers may use special high-occupancy vehicles or "diamond" lanes on some highways and freeways, which avoid heavy congestion and speed the traffic flow.

Chances are good that car-pool groups are already established where you work. Many companies have informal car-pool options or ride-sharing boards. Some incorporate programs and ideas from Commuter Choice at www.CommuterChoice.gov, a joint effort by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation that recognizes "best workplaces for commuters." Visit the commuter Web site.

Some cities, such as Boulder, Colo., are recognized for the incentives they offer to city employees who use alternative methods of transportation. Free parking spaces are offered to car pools, and employees are also entitled to free bicycles or bus passes -- bought with revenue from city parking meters.

For other gas-saving options, call your state department of transportation. Numbers can be found at state Web sites. In Connecticut, for example, the government operates park-and-ride lots, promotes high-occupancy vehicle lanes and works with public-transportation organizations to provide alternatives to driving alone.

Finally, surf the Internet. Sites have sprung up to organize car pools. Several states and metropolitan areas have their own government-run versions, while other sites are independently run to serve commuters across the country.

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